

## APPENDIX K

### AREAS OF CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN (ACECS)

## ACEC EVALUATION PROCESS BACKGROUND AND SUMMARY

The Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) designation is an administrative designation used by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) that is accomplished through the land use planning process. It is unique to the BLM in that no other agency uses this form of designation. The Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) states that the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) will give priority to the designation and protection of ACECs in the development and revision of land use plans.

BLM regulations (43 CFR part 1610) define an ACEC as an area “within the public lands where special management attention is required (when such areas are developed or used or where no development is required) to protect and prevent irreparable damage to important historic, cultural, or scenic values, fish and wildlife resources, or other natural systems or processes, or to protect life and safety from natural hazards.” Private lands and lands administered by other agencies are not included in the boundaries of ACECs. ACECs differ from other special management designations such as Wilderness Study Areas in that designation by itself does not automatically prohibit or restrict other uses in the area (with the exception that a mining plan of operation is required for any proposed mining activity within a designated ACEC). In order to be designated, special management beyond standard provisions established by the plan must be required to protect the relevant and important values.

Sixty-three nominations were evaluated in the Dillon RMP planning process using the Relevance and Importance Criteria described in this appendix. Additional information describing the nomination and evaluation process and the results of the assessment are contained in a report prepared by the BLM Dillon Field Office in November 2002 (USD-BLM 2002c). This report is incorporated by reference into this document as background material for the Draft Dillon RMP/EIS.

## RELEVANCE AND IMPORTANCE CRITERIA

### Relevance

An area meets the relevance criteria if it contains one or more of the following:

- A significant historic, cultural, or scenic value (including but not limited to rare or sensitive archeological resources and religious or cultural resources important to native Americans).
- A fish and wildlife resource (including but not limited to habitat for endangered, sensitive, or threatened species, or habitat essential for maintaining species diversity).
- A natural process or system (including but not limited to endangered, sensitive, or threatened plant species; rare, endemic, or relic plants or plant communities which are terrestrial, aquatic, or riparian; or rare geological features).
- Natural hazards (including but not limited to areas of avalanche, dangerous flooding, landslides, unstable soils, seismic activity, or dangerous cliffs). A hazard caused by human action may meet the relevance criteria if it is determined through the RMP process that it has become part of a natural process.

### Importance

The value, resource, system, process, or hazard described in the relevance section must have substantial significance and values to meet the importance criteria. This generally means that the value, resource, system, process, or hazard is characterized by one or more of the following:

- Has more than locally significant qualities which give it special worth, consequence, meaning, distinctiveness, or cause for concern, especially compared to any similar resource.
- Has qualities or circumstances that make it fragile, sensitive, rare, irreplaceable, exemplary, unique, endangered, threatened, or vulnerable to adverse change.

- Has been recognized as warranting protection in order to satisfy national priority concerns or to carry out the mandates of FLPMA.
- Has qualities that warrant highlighting in order to satisfy public or management concerns about safety and public welfare.
- Poses a significant threat to human life and safety or to property.

## SUMMARY

A total of 63 nominated areas were evaluated as part of the Dillon land use planning process. These included areas previously nominated in 1979 in the Dillon MFP, nominations received from the public as part of scoping, and areas nominated or expanded by BLM staff specialists. As a result of work completed by a subgroup convened by the Western Montana Resource Advisory Council and a BLM review team, 14 of the 63 nominations met both the relevance and importance criteria and are analyzed within the ACEC sections of this Draft RMP/EIS. These 14 Potential ACECs are listed in Table 1 below. However, the Thorium City Site has been dropped as a Potential ACEC as a result of remediation of any health and safety threats. The 49 nominations which were considered and evaluated but rejected as Potential ACECs are listed in Table 2 below.

**Table 1**  
**Potential Areas of Critical Environmental Concern**

| <i>Area Name</i>                   | <i>Values of Concern</i>  | <i>Acres/Miles</i>                 |
|------------------------------------|---|------------------------------------|
| Beaverhead Rock                    | Historic resources  | 120 acres                          |
| Big Sheep Creek Basin              | Wetland habitats and associated sensitive plant species   | 2,393 acres within<br>25,990 acres |
| Block Mountain                     | Geologic features   | 8,661 acres                        |
| Blue Lake                          | Axolotl habitat   | 430 acres                          |
| Centennial Mountains               | Scenic values, grizzly bear, lynx, wolf habitats, wildlife migration, Whipple's beardtongue, avalanche ecology  | 40,715 acres                       |
| Centennial Sandhills               | Sand dune complex and associated plant species of special concern   | 1,040 acres                        |
| Centennial Valley Wetlands         | Wetland habitats, peregrine falcon, trumpeter swan, and other migratory bird habitat, paleontological resources | 17,388 acres                       |
| Everson Creek                      | Cultural resources  | 8,608 acres                        |
| Ferruginous Hawk Nesting Area      | Ferruginous hawk nests/habitat  | 114,300 acres                      |
| Lewis & Clark Trail                | Historic resource   | 8,136 acres;<br>16 miles           |
| Muddy Creek/Big Sheep Creek        | Scenic values, cultural resources   | 22,829 acres                       |
| Thorium City Site                  | Radioactivity as a natural hazard   | 82 acres                           |
| Virginia City Historic District    | Historic resources  | 513 acres                          |
| Westslope Cutthroat Trout Habitats | Westslope cutthroat trout populations with greater than 99% purity  | 1,934 acres;<br>74 miles           |

**Table 2**  
**ACEC Nominations Considered But Rejected**

| <i>Nomination</i>   | <i>Acres/Miles of Public Land</i> | <i>Reason Nomination Did Not Move Forward as Potential ACEC</i>   |
|---|-----------------------------------|---|
| Alaska Basin Wildlife Linkage   | 3,200 acres                       | Did not meet relevance criteria for natural system or process within public lands given scattered public land ownership.  |
| Axolotl Lakes   | 5,440 acres                       | Did not meet relevance criteria for general fish and wildlife (see Blue Lake potential ACEC for axolotl habitat). Did not meet the importance criteria for scenic values.   |
| Badger Gulch/Reservoir Creek  | 25,000 acres                      | Met the relevance criteria but did not meet the importance criteria for fish and wildlife resource or as a natural process or system.   |
| Bannack Historic District   | 950 acres                         | There are no public lands administered by BLM remaining in this area.   |
| Blacktail Wildlife Linkage  | 56,000 acres                      | Did not meet relevance criteria for natural system or process within public lands given scattered public land ownership or for fish and wildlife resources given similar habitats in the area and region.   |
| Bull Trout Habitats   | 0                                 | There are no known bull trout habitats in the DFO planning area.  |
| Centennial Valley and Mountains   | Not calculated                    | Did not meet the relevance criteria given the broad nature of the nomination. More specific information is addressed in the Centennial Mountains, Centennial Sandhills, and Centennial Valley Wetlands nominations which are all potential ACECs. |
| City of Butte Big Hole River Diversion  | 0                                 | Nomination is located outside of the DFO planning area.   |
| City of Dillon Grasshopper Creek Diversion  | Not calculated                    | This nomination is included in the Dillon Field Office Municipal Water Supplies nomination, but did not meet the relevance criteria.  |
| City of Lima Municipal Watershed  | Not calculated                    | This nomination is included in the Dillon Field Office Municipal Water Supplies nomination, but did not meet the relevance criteria.  |
| Clark Canyon  | 6,844 acres                       | Did not meet the criteria for relevance as a natural hazard.  |
| Dillon Field Office   | 900,000 acres                     | Did not meet the relevance criteria given the broad and general nature of the nomination to cover all public lands in the planning area.  |
| Dillon Field Office Municipal Water Supplies (includes City of Dillon Grasshopper Creek Diversion and City of Lima Municipal Watershed nominations) | Not calculated                    | Inadequate nomination materials. Did not meet the relevance criteria based on best available information.   |

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| East Fork Blacktail Deer Creek              | 6,231 acres    | Met the relevance criteria for scenic and fish and wildlife resources, but not for natural hazards. Did not meet the importance criteria for scenic or fish and wildlife resources when compared to other areas in the region and state.             |
| Ermont Mill Site                            | Not calculated | Did not meet the relevance criteria; not a natural hazard or process.  |
| Glen Tungsten Mill Site                     | 20 acres       | Did not meet the relevance criteria; not a natural hazard or process.  |
| Grizzly Bear Use Areas                      | Not calculated | Inadequate nomination materials. No specific habitats identified. No location was provided for this nomination.  |
| Horse Prairie Watershed                     | 53,800 acres   | Did not meet the relevance criteria as no specific values were identified.   |
| Jerry Johnson Creek                         | Not calculated | Nomination is located outside of the DFO planning area.  |
| Johnson Gulch                               | 7,400 acres    | Did not meet the relevance criteria for fish and wildlife resources, but did meet relevance for natural process or system containing sensitive plants and good examples of endemic plant communities. However, did not meet the importance criteria. |
| Lemhi Pass                                  | 0              | No public lands administered by the BLM in this area.  |
| Lemhi Pass Wildlife Linkage                 | 2,400 acres    | Did not meet relevance criteria for natural system or process within public lands given scattered public land ownership or for fish and wildlife resources.  |
| Lima/Sweetwater Breaks Raptor Area          | Not calculated | Met the relevance criteria for fish and wildlife resource (raptors) but did not meet the importance criteria for all raptors, but only for ferruginous hawks given nest densities (see Ferruginous Hawk Nesting Area potential ACEC).                |
| Lima Reservoir                              | Not calculated | This nomination was within the boundaries of the Centennial Valley Wetlands nomination and was evaluated with that nomination and did not move forward on its own.   |
| Lynx Areas                                  | Not calculated | Inadequate nomination materials. No specific habitats identified.  |
| Madison River Corridor                      | Not calculated | Did not meet the relevance criteria given that it was nominated for recreation values.   |
| Maiden Rock/Camp Creek/<br>Soap Gulch       | Not calculated | Portions of this nomination are located outside the DFO planning area. The portions of this nomination within the boundaries of the Melrose-Maiden Rock Bighorn nomination were evaluated with that nomination.                                      |
| Medicine Lodge Divide Meteorite Impact Site | Not calculated | Did not meet the relevance criteria.   |

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| Melrose-Maiden Rock Bighorn (includes Maiden Rock/Camp Creek/Soap Gulch and Tendoy Bighorn nominations) | Not calculated | Met the relevance criteria but did not meet the importance criteria.   |
| Norris Hill Cyanide Leach Site  | 0              | Did not meet the relevance criteria; not a natural hazard or process. No location was provided for this nomination.  |
| Pipe Organ  | 900 acres      | Met the relevance criteria for historic values but not for fish and wildlife values. Did not meet the importance criteria for historic values (see Lewis and Clark Trail potential ACEC for that value). |
| Pony Town Dump  | 5 acres        | Did not meet the relevance criteria; not a natural hazard or process.  |
| Recreational Zones (heavily used)   | Not calculated | Inadequate nomination materials. No specific areas identified.   |
| Red Buttes Experiment Station Cyanide Leach Site  | Not calculated | Did not meet the relevance criteria; not a natural hazard or process. No location was provided for this nomination   |
| Red Rock  | Not calculated | This nomination was within the boundaries of the Centennial Valley Wetlands nomination and was evaluated with that nomination and did not move forward on its own.                                       |
| Rochester Mining District   | 23,000 acres   | Met the relevance criteria for historic values but not as a natural process or hazard. Did not meet the importance criteria for historic values.   |
| Sage Creek  | 35,000 acres   | Met the relevance criteria for fish and wildlife resource but did not meet the importance criteria.  |
| Sage Creek Rest-Rotation Research/Demonstration Area  | Not calculated | This nomination was withdrawn from review by the nominator.  |
| Sage Grouse Areas   | 887,000 acres  | Met the relevance criteria for fish and wildlife resource but did not meet the importance criteria.  |
| Sagebrush Creek   | 128,524 acres  | Met the relevance criteria for fish and wildlife resource and as a natural process or system, but did not meet the importance criteria.  |
| Standard Creek  | 80 acres       | Inadequate nomination materials. No specific values identified.  |
| Stone Creek Talc Mine   | Not calculated | Did not meet the relevance criteria.   |
| Taylor Mountain   | 3,800 acres    | This nomination was within the boundaries of the Centennial Mountains nomination and was evaluated with that nomination and did not move forward on its own.   |
| Tendoy Bighorn Sheep Habitat  | Not calculated | This nomination was evaluated with the Melrose-Maiden Rock Bighorn nomination and met the relevance criteria but not the importance criteria.  |

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| Upper Centennial Basin Bald Eagle Nesting Area | 40 acres       | Met the relevance criteria but not the importance criteria.   |
| Waters on 303(d) List                          | Not calculated | Did not meet the relevance criteria.  |
| Wildlife/Biological Corridors                  | Not calculated | This nomination was withdrawn from review by the nominator and replaced with other specific nominations (see Alaska Basin, Blacktail, and Lemhi Pass Wildlife Linkage nominations). |
| Wolf Areas                                     | Not calculated | Inadequate nomination materials. No specific habitats identified. No location was provided for this nomination.   |
| Wolverine Areas                                | Not calculated | Inadequate nomination materials. No specific habitats identified. No location was provided for this nomination.   |